

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 054 285

UD 011 800

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TITLE Cooperative Education: An Effective Education for
Minority Students.
PUB DATE 5 Sep 71
NOTE 13p.; Speech made before the American Psychological
Association National Meeting, Washington, D.C.,
September 5, 1971

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29
DESCRIPTORS College Programs, College Students, *Cooperative
Education, Cooperative Programs, *Educational Needs,
Educational Planning, Employment Experience, Junior
College Students, *Minority Groups, Motivation
Techniques, Negro Students, *Professional Education,
Professional Personnel, Spanish Speaking, Student
Employment, Student Motivation, *Undergraduate
Study, Work Experience, Work Study Programs

ABSTRACT

Cooperative education, the combination of periods of on-campus classroom instruction with periods of off-campus experience, is particularly well suited to the needs of minority students in higher education. At a traditional four-year college, minority students are inclined to confine their associations to their own members, both on campus and at home. Such students, therefore, never become a part of a nonminority world. Colleges offering cooperative study lead minority students into off-campus assignments which involve them in new situations and new environments essential to their development as professional personnel. Cooperative education offers the minority student a chance for gainful employment--perhaps his first chance. This helps remove the fear that he will be unable to find employment after graduation. Through cooperative jobs, many youths are introduced to work experience and job responsibilities for the first time. Coop employers furthermore tend to show greater patience and understanding with student employees. Through cooperative education, the minority student has the opportunity to find employment in large corporations, in government offices, and in scientific and technological firms--places where most minority students would never consider seeking employment. (Author/JM)

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COOPERATIVE EDUCATION: AN EFFECTIVE EDUCATION
FOR MINORITY STUDENTS

I have been given the title "Cooperative Education as the Ideal Education for Minority Students." I must say at the outset that no form of higher education is best for everybody, but cooperative education has certain aspects which lend themselves particularly well to meeting the educational needs of minority students. It is, therefore, in my judgment, one of the most effective forms of higher education for minority students in this country.

Our own experience at Northeastern University has been with black and Spanish-speaking minority students. I am, however, quite familiar with other programs for minority students at other cooperative education institutions by virtue of my recent editorship of a Handbook of Cooperative Education, currently in press with Jossey-Bass Publishers of San Francisco.

The Philosophy and Practice of Cooperative Education

Before speaking about the advantages cooperative education offers minority students, it may be helpful to review briefly the philosophy and practice of this uniquely American concept of higher education.

Address by Asa S. Knowles, President, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts; Vice Chairman, National Commission for Cooperative Education
American Psychological Association National Meeting, September 5, 1971, Washington, D. C.

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First of all, it is not a recent innovation. Cooperative education began in 1906 at the University of Cincinnati. It was adopted by my own institution, Northeastern University, in 1909. This means we have had more than sixty years to perfect the system and to adapt it to meet the demands of changing times and educational needs.

By definition, cooperative education is a form of education which combines periods of on-campus classroom instruction with periods of off-campus experience. In most instances, the off-campus experience is paid employment related to the major fields of study of students. Some institutions, however, are using the off-campus period to allow their students to carry out research, engage in independent study, pursue foreign travel, etc., thereby using the cooperative education principle as a means of introducing innovation into education and breaking the lockstep in higher education.

The execution of cooperative education takes many forms and is called by many names. A common pattern consists of a freshman year of full-time study followed by alternating periods of classroom study and off-campus experience in the upper-class years of a five year program. The off-campus experience is sometimes called professional practice, field experience, interlude program, schools without walls, internship program, experiential education, etc.

Some institutions place half of their students in the classroom and half off-campus at any one time. Others send all of their students off-

campus simultaneously and then return them to campus for classroom study at the same time.

Still another type of calendar operates on a parallel or concurrent basis whereby students spend half a day in the classroom and half a day in a work experience. Two-year colleges, particularly in metropolitan areas, operate on this basis. Such a calendar enables these schools to meet the needs of a number of minority students. Manhattan Community College does a fine job of serving Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong and the Spanish-speaking community with such a program.

Although there are other types of cooperative education, the alternating and concurrent programs are best for minority students, as they introduce the students to a work experience early in their collegiate career.

Cooperative Education Vs. the Four-Year Traditional College

At a traditional four-year college, minority students are inclined to confine their associations to their own members, both on campus and at home. Such students, therefore, complete four years of college without ever becoming a part of a nonminority world.

Colleges offering cooperative programs with alternating periods of work and study force minority students into off-campus assignments which involve them in new situations and new environments, essential to their development as professional personnel.

The growth of cooperative education is reflected in the fact that there are at present 225 colleges and universities in the United States offering a wide variety of programs involving off-campus experience. In addition, in 1970 there were 165 different curricula on the cooperative plan. These programs are offered at the junior college, senior college, and graduate school levels.

A recent survey of seventy black colleges conducted by Lena M. McKinney, Director of Cooperative Education at Morgan State College in Baltimore, Maryland, indicated that cooperative programs are in existence at twenty-five black colleges as well as several other Southern institutions which serve large numbers of black enrollees. As mentioned previously, other coop schools serve other minority groups as well.

The Advantages of Cooperative Education to Minority Youth

What makes cooperative education so appealing to minority youth? The reasons are many.

Motivation

First of all, cooperative education offers the minority student a chance for gainful employment--something he or she may never have previously known. This helps to remove the student's fear that he will be unable to find employment after graduation. This opportunity spawns motivation, and motivation in turn results in achievement--success, if you will--which is still another new experience for many minority youth.

Introduction to Work Experience

Secondly, through cooperative jobs, many youths are introduced to work experience and job responsibilities for the first time. Learning the most simple office routine may represent a whole new world to a minority youngster, who has never known the responsibilities of punctuality on the job, completion of assignments, the development of cordial working relations with others, the taking of directions, acceptable office decorum, proper terms of address or appropriate modes of attire in the business world. Coop employers tend to show greater patience and understanding with student employees--a decided advantage to the young man or woman who may be slow to catch on to all that is expected.

Exposure to New Forms of Employment

Another advantage of the cooperative system lies in the minority student's opportunity to find employment in large corporations, in government offices, in scientific and technological firms--in short, in many environments frequently denied the summer-job or part-time worker, especially if he happens to be of a minority race. Most minority students would never consider seeking employment in a large engineering firm, a large insurance company, a bank, stock-broker's office, or some other equally sound symbol of the "establishment." But such employment is obtained for students by the university's coop coordinators. As a result, cooperative jobs expose minority students to a world they have never known and systematically encourage them to become a part of life outside their own community.

Breaking Down the Separatist Philosophy

This adherence to one's own culture in every aspect of life can be a stumbling block to the professional development of minority groups. Born and raised in a minority community, many students enroll in integrated colleges only to continue these associations at the total exclusion of the rest of the student body. The demands for black studies programs, black fraternities, black student unions--even the unofficial creation of separate tables in the cafeterias--are all examples of this separatist philosophy of self-imposed segregation. When such is the case, students enrolled in integrated but traditional four-year programs may go through their entire college experience without ever venturing outside the security of their own minority community.

Through cooperative education, minority students are forced to become a part of a larger society. A minority student placed in an office in which he is the only member of his race may find the experience uncomfortable at first, but such experience is necessary if he is to one day hold a professional position in which he is the only black, Mexican, Indian, or other minority engineer, chemist, or social scientist. Mrs. McKinney of Morgan State College reports in her chapter on minority students and cooperative education in the Handbook of Cooperative Education that there are many instances in which a black student's cooperative job has been responsible for the student's first real encounter with white people.

Cooperative Education Provides a Gradual Transition

I would not for a moment minimize the difficulties encountered by some minority youth in making an adjustment to the world of employment, but I would emphasize the fact that cooperative job placement makes the transition easier. The student who has been exposed to several different jobs while still a student is much more apt to make a successful adjustment than the student who attends four years of college, fraternizes only with his own kind, lives at home, and then tries to fit into a job in the professional community.

The Maturing Influence

In addition to bringing a minority student out of the culturally-sheltered existence in which he may have lived, cooperative education encourages the student to analyze the reasoning behind diverse customs, attitudes, prejudices, and modes of behavior. Every college student finds that his horizons expand as a result of his collegiate associations with students and faculty of diverse backgrounds and views. In cooperative institutions, this experience is further enriched by exposure to the viewpoints of associates in off-campus experiences.

A coop assignment may send a student to another city or another part of the country, broadening the student's horizons far beyond that of the traditional classroom experience. The Southern black who coops in Detroit will gain a unique insight into racial thinking in both parts of the country. In addition, a Northern black whose

coop job is in a federal office in Washington, D. C., will gain a new, nonghetto view of the workings of government agencies.

Enlarging Vocational Horizons

Another advantage of cooperative education is the way in which it encourages minority students to break away from their traditional occupations and venture into new fields of study. A large number of minority students tend to concentrate in such fields as education, sociology, or nursing, because they believe them to be the only areas in which they can obtain full-time employment after graduation. Through coop, these students can be encouraged to enter new fields where few members of their race are presently employed. Cooperative education gives them experience in their field of study while they are in college. This experience helps to assure them a job after graduation.

There are many fields in which companies are actively endeavoring to recruit minority managerial and professional employees, but too few have the professional training necessary. Black mathematics majors, engineers, finance majors, physics or physical therapy students, for example, are in great demand by organizations genuinely seeking to add minority members to their staffs. Colleges are making special efforts now to encourage minority students to enter such programs of study as engineering, business administration, criminal justice, pharmacy, and the other allied health science professions.

The willingness of business to prepare minority personnel for professional positions is illustrated by a recent development in which a large national company agreed to take black coop students into

its employ as management trainees, send them to branch offices throughout the country, pay their travel and make a major contribution to the cost of their college tuition. This, they feel, is the only way they can effectively place black employees in full-time management positions.

Many new fields also are opening up into which cooperative education can introduce the minority student. Cooperative education programs currently exist in such developing careers as actuarial science, bio-medical engineering, community planning, criminal justice, data processing, environmental science, marine biology, oceanography, and transportation, to name but a few. These programs and others like them offer tremendous opportunity to the minority student willing to "take the road less traveled by."

Financial Advantages of Cooperative Education

Finally, for the minority student, like many other students, the financial advantage of attending college on the cooperative plan is a great asset.

The Morgan State College survey of black colleges to which I referred earlier, revealed that the family income level of students at nineteen of the colleges surveyed was \$7,500 or less. At Northeastern, we have found the average family income of our black students to be between \$6,000 and \$6,500. Obviously, such incomes cannot sustain a family of unknown numbers and meet today's college expenses as well. As coop students are paid the going rate for the jobs they hold, most students

are able to earn enough to pay their direct college expenses. This, combined with the loan and scholarship assistance generally available to minority students, enables students to finance their way through college.

Thus far, I have outlined the major advantages of coop which are unique to minority students. To these should be added the advantages enjoyed by all students, i.e., the opportunity to test a field by first-hand experience to determine if it is indeed what one wishes to make his life work, the opportunity to gain practical experience as a complement to theoretical classroom knowledge, the opportunity to mature more rapidly through job responsibilities prior to graduation and the opportunity to sample several types of employment before committing oneself to a specific career.

It would not be honest, however, if I did not also present a discussion of some of the difficulties encountered in the process of exposing minority students to cooperative education. Some of these problems are not unique to coop. They occur whenever such students seek advanced learning. Others are a byproduct of the coop system.

Problems of the Minority Student on the Cooperative Plan

The first problem, as I have indicated, is not unique to coop. All of us in higher education are troubled by the fact that most minority youth have not been college oriented during their high school years. In addition, many do not have sufficient academic preparation to enable them to master the freshman year curriculum. Recognizing this,

colleges have established tutorial programs for entering freshmen and permitted students to spread their freshman courses over a two-year period.

Another problem, which is not unique to coop but one with which we must contend, is the extent to which most minority students are dependent upon financial aid. Many minority students come from low-income families which cannot meet tuition payments. Cooperative employment makes a college education feasible, but it does not always pay all of the student's expenses if his family can offer no assistance whatsoever. In addition, there are times when minority students must contribute their coop earnings to the household budget, leaving them with little or no savings at the end of their coop terms. We at Northeastern have found it necessary to subsidize our minority students very heavily because of this fact. There are times when the student's coop earnings represent the first regular pay check the family has seen in some time. Is it any wonder a student in this position has no money to pay his tuition when he completes his working term?

The financial status of minority students is made even more complex by the fact, as mentioned previously, that most students tend to major in education or liberal arts which, on a national scale, are among the lower-paying fields. Northeastern's Center for Cooperative Education has found that Southern blacks enrolled in cooperative education programs are eager for placement in business and industry in order to enter professions and careers that will give them greater economic security

and a better standard of living. Many Northern blacks, however, are torn by the desire to help their own people rather than seek a coop position which would lead to a career capable of taking them out of their present environment.

Clearly it can be seen that minority students, torn by such conflicts, have a great need for guidance. At Northeastern, we have scheduled an October meeting between our minority students and representatives of our coop department to discuss this very problem, to offer guidance about the many career fields available to them, and to point out the financial advantages of these fields, both during school and after graduation.

Before closing, I would like to address myself to one further problem-- that of the cooperative work placement of minority students. As I have mentioned, the majority of our coop employers are willing, if not eager, to hire minority students. There are some places, however, where prejudice remains and coop coordinators must work to break down an employer's resistance to or reservations about hiring such personnel. When this is the case, the coordinator can argue his student's cause far more effectively than the student himself could or would care to do. Coop placements in such companies may seem like "tokenism" to the student, but the fact remains, the barrier has been broken and the placement of a second minority student (assuming the first one performs well) will be much easier.

Difficulties are sometimes encountered when students are placed in out-of-town jobs. Often times such students are fearful of their new surroundings, worried about finding housing, and lonely away from their own ethnic community. Sometimes students turn down excellent job opportunities for these very reasons. When the students can be persuaded to take out-of-state jobs, however, they often gain a new sense of confidence in their ability to cope in a new environment. Here I would point out that there are many minority students who come from fine backgrounds and are poised, well-adjusted individuals. When placement difficulties occur, they are usually encountered with students from low-income, underprivileged families.

Finally, the university has an obligation to help the minority student to realize that difficulties encountered on a job are not necessarily the result of a person's color or ethnic background. We all know that problems do arise in all working relationships. Such problems arise with minority students as well. The mature student will realize this. The immature student may not. Those black students, for example, who are experiencing what I believe those in your profession term an "identity crisis" may be so wrapped up in their "blackness" that a meaningful, productive and harmonious working relationship with whites is difficult if not impossible. As I indicated at the outset, cooperative education is not a panacea for all educational problems. I hope, however, after hearing my remarks, that you will agree with me that it is most certainly the most effective form of higher education for minority students today.